

Testimony of

Ray Rossomando

Connecticut Education Association

Before a joint meeting of the

Committee on Children

Re:

SB 205 An Act Establishing a Children's Mental Health Day in Connecticut

HB 5239 AAC Accommodations for English Language Learners

HB 5241 An Act Providing Funding to School Districts for the Use of Therapeutic Day Schools for Special Education

HB 5244 An Act Concerning the Provision of Opioid Antagonists in Schools

March 1, 2022

Representative Linehan, Senator Anwar and members of this esteemed committee. My name is Ray Rossomando, and I serve as the Director of Policy, Research, and Government Relations for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

I testify today on various bills under consideration in the committee today:

SB 205 An Act Establishing a Children's Mental Health Day in Connecticut

CEA supports the intent of SB 205 An Act Establishing a Children's Mental Health Day in Connecticut, recognizing that the need for such a bill speaks to many larger issues.

A mental health day for schoolchildren may raise awareness of the childhood mental health crisis in Connecticut and would provide some respite for schoolchildren from rigors and intensity of the school year. However, alone it will not meaningfully address the needs of children experiencing mental health challenges or some of the conditions in schools that intensify them.

CEA believes that far more must be done to alleviate the childhood mental health crisis in Connecticut. We applaud the Committee on Children members for raising HB 5001 and SB 2 as well as bills like SB 205, which all seek to find solutions to this crisis.

As committee members consider additional avenues for alleviating the children's mental health crisis, we ask that you also consider:

Reducing standardized testing burdens. Reduce the amount of time for mastery examinations and limit the testing to specific grades, between grades 3 and 11. In the early grades, tests can be developmentally inappropriate causing stress and anxiety. This shift to testing and academics means less time for social-emotional and executive function development through play, creativity, problem solving, and collaboration, resulting in greater difficulty in a child's ability to regulate emotions and decisions.

Raising the Kindergarten start age. Join with the 49 other states that believe that children should be at least 5 years old to start Kindergarten and expand early childhood opportunities to accommodate the shift. The impact of starting kindergarten as little as one or two months earlier can be significant for students who are not as developmentally advanced as others. Add to that, an increasingly rigorous curriculum now being imposed in earlier grades, including kindergarten, and many children are faced with intense frustration causing stress and anxiety.

Promoting developmentally appropriate curricula in early grades. Work with appropriate experts to reinforce educational value of play, limit standardized testing, and revise the Common Core Standards for students in early grades to promote age-appropriate learning and development.

Incorporating the Vision of the Graduate into the school accountability system. Diminish reliance on testing by ensuring that the vision of the graduate is a part of the state's accountability system.

HB 5239 AAC Accommodations for English Language Learners

CEA supports the intent of HB 5239 to provide welcoming accommodations for English learners to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

Across the state, teachers use creativity and judgement to help English learners master content and language. They recognize that this must be done at the same time these same children are also overcoming challenges associated with navigating cultural differences and developing socially and emotionally.

For HB 5239 to truly be successful, it is critical for decision-makers to ensure that time and resources are designated for the planning, development, and implementation of innovative and effective accommodation strategies.

HB 5241 An Act Providing Funding to School Districts for the Use of Therapeutic Day Schools for Special Education

CEA Supports HB 5241.

HB 5244 An Act Concerning the Provision of Opioid Antagonists in Schools

CEA Supports HB 5244.